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SUCCESS STORY

Serbian Growers Import New Varieties

Initial sales of these new varieties were \$11,000, opening new markets for Serbian berry growers



Members of the Serbian delegation observe the laboratory at Hargreaves Plants where they propagate new varieties of berries for the European market.

A primary goal of Agribusiness Project assistance to the berry sector is to shift sales from frozen to fresh. The import and planting of new varieties, particularly those varieties most appropriate for the fresh markets in Europe and North America, is a key element of the Project strategy for the sector.

One of the obstacles to expanded fresh berry sales from Serbia is the lack of varieties suitable for fresh markets in the EU. To address this issue, and to increase growers' awareness of the preferred varieties, the USAID Agribusiness Project organized a visit by a representative of "Hargreaves Plants" from the UK, considered to be one of best suppliers of berry fruit plants in Europe. As a result of this visit, a group of project clients decided to visit the UK to observe the production of berries under tunnels, and to arrange for sales with potential buyers. The National Association "Serbian Fruits" requested technical and financial assistance for organizing this Trade Mission.

In November 2008, a ten member Serbian Fruits delegation made a 5-day visit to the UK with Project assistance. The delegation visited Hargreaves Plants, input and extension providers, berry fruit growers, and potential buyers. The participants came to understand the importance of quality planting materials, and decided to purchase new raspberry varieties from the UK. Following the Trade Mission, the Agribusiness Project and the companies worked together to harmonize Serbian legislation on planting material categories with those of the UK. Once this was completed, the harmonization allowed the companies to import of new planting material from the UK.

Companies on the Trade Mission imported nearly 100,000 raspberry seedlings, and these seedlings were used to plant 10 hectares of new fields of berries for the fresh market. Half of these new plantings are the "Polka" cultivar, which is considered to be the best raspberry variety for the fresh fruit market, and which was imported into Serbia for the first time.

Thanks to the high quality of planting material and the professional support from the Project, clients from Piroć, Obrež, Kraljevo, and Djurdjevo had their first harvest of "Polka" raspberry, and they recorded new sales income of more than \$11,000 for these berries. These initial, highly encouraging results will be drastically higher in 2010, when these raspberry plants are more mature during the harvest season, and when the sales of planting materials derived from the UK imports will begin.